

i'm not okay (but i will be one day) by Homiestasis

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Summary:

Steve gets a camera and a collection of Polaroids that say more about him than he ever wanted to know.

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Author's Note:

Just a little something I was thinking about. Hope you enjoy!

"You still kept this one?"

When Jonathan turns to look at him, Steve's holding a broken camera in his hands. It's the one he had broken after seeing the pictures Jonathan took of Nancy, cracked and missing a part of the casing.

"I figured I could get it fixed, but then you guys got me a new one. Kind of forgot to get rid of it afterwards." He shrugs, going back to rifling through his cassette collection, trying to find the Motley Crue one.

"You mind if I take it?"

This time, when Jonathan turns to look at him he appears to be confused, maybe even curious. Steve just shrugs, trying for nonchalance. He's not sure how to explain why he wants to keep the camera, just knows that he feels like he *needs* to.

So he's relieved when, after a moment, Jonathan nods. He gives him instructions on where he can get it fixed, a few tips about taking pictures, and that's that.

Guess Steve owns a camera now. Fun times.

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Bitterness.

That's what the first picture he takes makes him feel.

He had stared in the mirror, brown eyes taking in the aftermath of Billy Hargrove's anger, of two nights of restless sleep and nightmares that left the phantom taste of rot and ash on his tongue. Had stared, looking at the canvas of bruises, black and blue and purple.

Nebulae on ashen skin at 3 AM.

His fingers had been shaking, a hint of desperation in his movements, when he reached for the camera. The flash had reflected on the cracked bathroom mirror, the outcome of a previous panic attack, blinding him for a moment. The end effect had made his stomach churn when he saw it.

With his eyes scrunched closed and the bruises lit up by the light of the flash, he had looked so fragile. Vulnerable and in pain. The bags under his eyes were so dark that they blended in with the bruises already there.

He hated the picture.

It was still tucked safely in between the yellowed pages of an old empty journal.

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The second picture taken comes courtesy of Dustin.

He had spent a whole week locked up in his room, bitter and scared, too afraid to be alone but too tired to face the whispers that would undoubtedly follow him. Each time he closed his eyes, he saw Billy's face. Twisted in anger, golden curls flying with the force of his punches, but there had been something in the depth of those blue eyes. Something like fear, like regret.

Something Steve had wanted to forget if only because he didn't think he could stand it if there was something more to Billy Hargrove than all the fury.

On Saturday, the doorbell rang. Insistent and unrelenting, the shrill sound hadn't stopped until he had wrenched open the door, scathing words dying in his throat at the sight that greeted him.

"Mom made extra chicken pot pie because she knows it's your favorite," Dustin had said as soon as the door had opened, shouldering his way past Steve on his way to the kitchen. "And everyone's been worried about you so I figured it was about time to force you out of your self-enforced pity party."

"It's not a pity party..." He remembered himself murmuring, lips pursed into a pout as he followed the boy into the kitchen.

By the look Dustin threw him, it was obvious he saw right through his bullshit.

It had been later, stomach full for the first time in days, that the younger boy had spotted the camera he must've left on the coffee table at some point. Steve had been lazing on the couch, eyes closed and mind blessedly empty when the sudden flash of a camera had gone off, startling him.

"What the hell, dingus?"

When he had opened his eyes, Dustin had been grinning wide, all boyish smugness. He had only given Steve a moment before the shutter had gone off again. And again. And *again* .

He had taken pictures until the camera had run out of film, avoiding all attempts Steve had made to wrench the camera out of his hands. Despite the annoyance he had felt though, a smile curled on Steve's lips for the first time since they had made it out of the tunnels.

Looking back on the stack of Polaroids, most of them had ended up blurry and unfocused from the chase. Only that very first one he had kept. He had looked content, faded bruises and eyebags the only hints that not everything was okay but that maybe it was getting better.

Bitterness and Hope. Maybe he should start a collection.

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The third picture doesn't even come from his camera at all.

"Wha-?"

Once the brightness of the flash cleared, Steve turned to look at Nancy perched on the hood of Jonathan's car, his camera in her hands. She was smiling at him the same way she used to back when they had started dating, all dimpled cheeks and crinkled eyes. She was even more beautiful now, but she was no longer his.

His chest ached with the knowledge. A quick jolt of pain.

It still didn't explain why she had just taken a picture of him.

"You should talk to them. If you miss them, that is." He didn't understand what she meant until the photo finished developing and she handed it to him.

She'd captured his right side in the frame, his gaze seemingly lost in a random point in the distance. At least, that's what he thought at first before he spotted the outline of a couple on the opposite edge of the

frame. They looked a little blurry because of the distance, but it was clear Steve's gaze was fixed on them. Longing was etched deep and clear on his features.

Maybe he should have stopped assuming that nobody was paying attention to him these days.

"Why would I talk to Tommy and Carol? They are assholes." It had come out a little too quickly, a little too guarded. An obvious lie.

"So were you, but you changed." She gave him a soft but knowing look. Like she could see right through him. Maybe she could, he wouldn't put it past her. "Plus, you guys were friends since childhood weren't you? Those types of bonds aren't that easy to forget."

And he knew there was truth in her words, but he felt scared.

Because although Steve was fine these days with no longer being considered *King Steve*, it was one thing to just passively lose popularity and another one to have Tommy and Carol spouting his secrets for everybody to hear.

Thing was, they hadn't done that yet. Even with Billy now being the ruling king, they still hadn't.

"Maybe." And for a while that had been that.

Later that week he had dropped by Tommy's house. Tommy had begrudgingly accepted to talk after Carol needed him a little. They had talked and apologized, although it would take some time and effort before things between them resembled that of old.

Bitterness. Hope. Longing. Wonder what would join his collection next.

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By the time the fourth polaroid joined the others in the old journal, his room was filled with dozens of pictures of his friends --his family-- hanging on strings over his head.

"I didn't peg you for a photographer, princess."

Billy had been standing in the middle of the room, looking at the motley array of pictures that littered the room. He had one in his hand, tugging surprisingly gently on the string so he could get a better look at it.

"Well I didn't peg you for an idiot, but somehow you're in my room instead of the bathroom." But the heat that normally would accompany his words hadn't been there, the corner of his lips curling into a replica of a smile.

He remembers walking further into the room until he had stood next to the blonde, not quite touching but close enough to feel the heat of

his body. At the time he hadn't thought much of the heat on his cheeks, attributing it to his embarrassment when he spotted the picture in Billy's hand.

It depicted Steve and Jonathan, both of them either high or drunk. He had been draped over Jonathan's side, pressing a lipstick-covered kiss to his cheek. Dark red lipstick and black eyeshadow to match, to be exact. Probably high, that's the only way he would've allowed Nancy to put any of her makeup on him.

"Black really doesn't fit you, pretty boy." Billy had teased him, all wide smirks and tongue between his teeth.

"Oh shut the fuck up, Billy." He had scoffed, punching his arm. "I looked damn fine."

And the way Billy had laughed, loud and honest and surprisingly bright. Steve couldn't help himself. He wasn't sure why he had found it so important at the moment but it had been, so he had grabbed his camera and snapped a photo.

Billy had stopped laughing at once, but at least he hadn't tried to take the photo.

It would be two weeks later when Steve realized what it was that he had seen at that moment. Another week before he had scrawled *Love* at the bottom of the polaroid and tucked it safely with the others in the journal.

The fifth photo just cements Steve's resolve to never show anybody the polaroids tucked inside the old journal.

"B...B-Billy *fuck* ... baby, please. I can't- I *can't. Please.* "

Steve bit down on his bottom lip so hard that he had tasted blood. It had been impossible to quieten his sounds and focus on rolling his hips at the same time, especially when Billy seemed intent on covering his neck with as many lovebites as he could.

"Gonna come for me, baby? Come on my cock all pretty?"

And, oh god, Steve had *whined* .

High, and breathy, and so fucking lewd. Billy hadn't even touched him and he had been so close already, desperately chasing an orgasm that had been denied twice already. His eyes had been closed, head thrown back as pleasure mounted, dragging him even closer.

If he had opened them, maybe he would've seen what Billy was doing.

"Come for me, baby."

He vaguely registered the flash of a camera going off at the same time tremors overtook his body, thighs shaking with the force of his orgasm.

Later, when they were curled up on the couch going through the remains of a pizza, Billy had handed him the polaroid. *Lust* had been scrawled at the bottom of the photo in his boyfriend's neat calligraphy.

"For your collection." Was what he had said.

*

If somebody were to ask what his favorite polaroid was, Steve thinks he would have to choose number 6.

He had caught Billy looking at his chest in the mirror, where the pale white scars twisted across the expanse of his chest. After the Mind Flayer, he had taken to wearing his shirts buttoned all the way. Even in bed with Steve, it was rare that he ever took off his shirt.

The look on his boyfriend's face then had been so miserable. All the iron defenses stripped away until only the fragile vulnerability underneath remained. It had pushed him to step into the room, wrapping his arms loosely around Billy's waist.

For a second Billy had tensed up, muscles going taut, eyes widening a fraction before he relaxed into Steve's arms with a sigh. The fragility

had still been there but his roughened edges had softened some.

"What's on your mind, baby?" He had whispered, pressing a kiss to a bare shoulder.

He hadn't gotten an outright answer at the time, but each kiss Billy pressed against his lips had been stained with a restless kind of desperation. Like he had wanted to etch each kiss on his skin and remember them forever, just in case he were to lose it all again.

And yeah, Steve knew exactly how that felt.

"Billy, I'm not going anywhere, okay?" The words had been muttered between slow kisses, reassuring and gentle. Silently begging Billy to believe in his words. "This? Us? I want this to be forever. Even if it's hard, or we have bumps along the way, I want to stay by your side."

Steve had gotten an idea then. With a quick *I'll be back* he slipped back to his room and grabbed his camera, giving it to Billy once he was back. His boyfriend had been understandably confused.

"Um, so I know this probably sounds lame and you can say no but just- Hear me out okay." He had taken a deep breath to try and battle the blush coloring his cheeks. "I was thinking that, as a... promise or something, we could take a photo each year. Just as a reminder. Of us. If you want, I mean, it's kind of a dumb id-"

Warm lips pressed against his, effectively shutting him up.

"You're a dork, Stevie." But Billy had still pointed the camera at the cracked mirror and taken the photo before dragging Steve back to bed.

Author's Note:

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